



by Jason Cupp
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finally... spring's colors



This time of year is always incredibly exciting – especially for those of us that love the landscape, and the beauty that it provides.

Once spring has officially hit, the grass is greening, trees and shrubs are growing their foliage, and plants that flower begin to bud. It's an amazing transformation from winter to spring.

One thing I've learned over the twenty or so years I've been in the landscape industry is that our new clients undoubtedly ask two questions in their initial consultation:

- 1) Can you create a landscape that has the least maintenance possible?
- 2) Can you make suggestions to add color to the landscape on a regular basis?

Although creating a "maintenance-free" landscape is near impossible, there are several things you can do to design and install a landscape that does not require you to be a Master Gardener to maintain it. Any landscape will need the appropriate amount of water, fertilization, pruning, weeding, and winter care. Watering can be accomplished through an automatic irrigation system. As I've said in previous columns, I'd always leave the fertilizing up to a state-certified, licensed, and insured lawn and landscape operator.

► pg. 23

Pruning, weeding and winter care can be minimized in the planning stage. First, I'd always recommend that you have a professional landscape designer to any garden plan—this will ensure that the proper plant material is chosen based on sun/shade, water requirements, and what simply works in our area.

For example, although they are beautiful, azaleas and rhododendrons are very difficult to grow in the Kansas City area. They require a different soil acidity level than most any other plants. Think of it this way – if you want those plants, your landscape bed will require a completely different set of maintenance – just for the plants to live.

Also, natural landscapes offer less maintenance simply due the fact they are designed to be less “formal” – therefore not needing as much pruning. Last month, down the street from my Overland Park home, a landscape contractor installed a project that had a combination of Native Grasses, Hybrid Roses, Boxwood, Spruces, and other “natural” plant material. Obviously, this client requested a low maintenance landscape. I was also impressed with the usage of larger stone in the landscape bed—as aesthetic influence, but also helped reduce the need for weeding.

Color is the second most asked question of our Landscape Designers. The easy answer for Kansas City – Seasonal Color – otherwise known as annuals. I believe that any landscape needs to have a portion of it dedicated to the constant flowering of different colors, accenting the landscape, the home, and the footprint and architecture of the space.

This can be accomplished through raised beds near a walkway, pots on the porch or a patio, outcroppings in a defined landscape, or simply around tree rings where grass is difficult to grow. The first step to choosing an appropriate annual flower (defined as growing only one season) is to let your creativity flow by choosing your favorite colors. Then, is the area sunny or shady, or a combination of both? One of the most important parts of installing annuals is to have proper bed prep. Till or turn the soil, and add potting soil or soil conditioner. The soil should be easy to work with, and it should drain well. ► pg. 27



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I asked my team of Landscape Designers to give me five examples of annuals – some common, and some not so common:

- Begonia - Shade to Part Sun, 6-12 Inches Tall by 9-12 Inches Wide—Begonias can be found in many colors—red, pink, salmon and white, with green or bronze leaf structures. They bloom consistently from spring to frost.
- Periwinkle - Full Sun, 6-12 Inches Tall by 10 Inches Wide – Periwinkle has large flowers, 2 inches wide, that come in shades of red, white, pink, lavender, apricot and rose. Often, they have contrasting center or eye colors, with glossy green foliage. These are perfect for high heat or drought areas.
- Impatiens –Part Shade to Shade, 8-24 Inches Tall by 10-15 Inches Wide – Impatiens are a favorite, and are available in virtually every color – even bright orange (we've had client request them). They are perfect for shady areas, and will be highly successful. They will provide color from installation to the first frost.
- Ornamental Pepper – Full Sun, 6-24 Inches Tall by 6-12 Inches Wide – Ornamental Peppers offer a unique texture and bright colors. Fruits are edible, add a unique look and focus, but are often poor quality or hot.

- Fan Flower – Full Sun, 4-9 Inches Tall by 18 Inches Wide – This unique annual resemble a fan since all of the petals emerge from one side. With green leaves and vibrant blues – dark blue, lavender blue, and blue – they offer a unique contrast. They are often used in containers and hanging baskets.



I hope you develop a landscape this season that reduces the amount of time you have to spend in your beds, yet have the everlasting color that annuals provide.

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